

Update: Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus Infection Associated with Rodents

On Friday August 5, 2005, a LINCS notification was distributed to local health departments, medical care providers, veterinarians and animal control officers with information on an investigation of lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV) infection in pet rodents. In their investigation of this incident, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified an infection rate of approximately 3% among hamsters sampled at the Mid-South Distributors of Ohio. Rodents from this pet distributor were shipped to six New Jersey pet stores on July 18, 2005, before the distributor was quarantined. All animals in this shipment have been quarantined and removed from commerce. The distribution of potentially infected rodents from the distributor has been stopped.

A copy of the CDC Update: Interim Guidance for Minimizing Risk for Human LCMV Infection Associated with Rodents MMWR, 54: Dispatch, August 12, 2005, is attached and available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm54d812a1.htm>. This document outlines recommended options that state authorities should consider to minimize the risk for LCMV transmission from pet rodents.

NJDHSS has created a fact sheet entitled "Safe Handling Practices for Pet Rodents" (copy attached) for purchasers of pet rodents to inform them of LCMV-specific risks and general safe handling practices for pet rodents (attached). **Under the authority in N.J.A.C. 8:23A-1.9 (i), local health departments are requested to provide copies of this fact sheet to every pet shop within their jurisdiction that sells pet rodents and require that pet shop staff give a fact sheet to all persons adopting or purchasing a pet rodent.** Persons who are pregnant or have weakened immune systems should be advised against purchasing a pet rodent. If possible, local health department personnel should perform a complete facility inspection when fact sheets are distributed to evaluate general compliance with the sanitary regulations governing the operation of animal facilities. Stores should be periodically checked to verify that the fact sheets are being distributed with each purchased rodent, by calling rodent purchasers, visualizing a supply of fact sheets by the cash register, or other verification methods.

In order to prevent cross-contamination to new rodent stock, pet shops that have purchased rodents from Mid-South Distributors since February 1, 2005 should be required to sell down existing inventories of pet rodents and not restock until surfaces, cages and equipment that have been in contact with rodents, their waste or bedding material, is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Disinfection can be accomplished using a dilute bleach solution (one-half cup of bleach to one gallon of water) or a household disinfectant used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Persons who are pregnant or have weakened immune systems should not engage in these cleaning and disinfection activities. Once cleaning and disinfection has been completed, new supplies of rodents can be brought into the store. Facilities that have not received rodents from this distributor are not required to clean and disinfect prior to restocking. CDC is leading efforts to ensure that rodents from wholesale distributors are free from LCMV.

Because LCMV is spread into pet rodents from contact with infected wild house mice (*Mus musculus*), pet shop management should be instructed to address any wild rodent problems within their stores. Local health department personnel should inspect pet stores for signs of rodent infestation when the fact sheets are distributed and require aggressive abatement of any wild rodent infestation identified.

Please contact the NJDHSS Infectious and Zoonotic Disease Program at (609) 588-3121, if there are additional concerns or questions.